DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 885 PS 027 563

AUTHOR Hess, Laura E.; Graff, Jennifer M.
TITLE Children's Safety at School: Ecological and Social Support Factors.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Albuquerque, NM, April 15-18, 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Safety; Comparative Analysis; Context Effect; *Ecological Factors; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; *School Safety; Social Support Groups; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Protective Factors; Risk Factors; Victimization

ABSTRACT

The present study examined features of the school ecology and social support as risk and protective factors in students' safety at school among 73 third- through fifth-grade students. Students' perceptions of safety in several contexts within schools were assessed. Student, peer, and teacher perceptions of victimization were contrasted. In addition, social support from parents, teachers, friends, and classmates, as well as perceptions of support from others with regard to victimization in particular and students' safety at school were examined. Findings indicated that students felt more safe when in closed areas characterized by more adult monitoring (in their classrooms), and least safe in open, less closely monitored areas (on the playground). Self-reports and peer reports of victimization were related and were associated with safety in the classroom and at recess, although teacher reports were unrelated to self-reports and were associated only with classroom safety. The findings have implications for creating safer school environments. (Contains 12 references.) (Author/KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 451 885

Children's Safety at School: Ecological and Social Support Factors

Laura E. Hess
Jennifer M. Graff

Purdue University

Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development
Albuquerque, NM
April 15-18, 1999

Address correspondence to:

Laura E. Hess, Ph.D.
Child Dev. & Family Studies Dept.
Purdue University
1267 CDFS Building
West Lafayette, IN 47906-1267

E-mail: hessl@cfs.purdue.edu

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Laura E. Hess

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

PS 027563

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Children's Safety at School: Ecological and Social Support Factors

Laura E. Hess and Jennifer M. Graff
Purdue University

ABSTRACT

The present study examined features of the school ecology and social support as risk and protective factors in students' safety at school among 73 third through fifth grade students. Students' perceptions of safety within several contexts within schools were assessed. Student, peer, and teacher perceptions of victimization were contrasted. In addition, social support from parents, teachers, friends, and classmates, in addition to perceptions of support from others in regards to victimization in particular and students' safety at school was examined. Findings indicated that students felt more safe when in closed areas characterized by more adult monitoring (in their classrooms), and least safe in open, less closely monitored areas (on the playground). Self-reports and peer reports of victimization were related and were associated with safety in the classroom and at recess, although teacher reports were unrelated to self reports and were only associated with classroom safety. The results have implications for creating safer school environments.

INTRODUCTION

School violence has reached epidemic proportions across the United States, and represents a major health concern for students, teachers, and their families (U.S. House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, 1994). As many as 1 of 8 students in grades 6 through 12 have reported being victimized at school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). The lack of both real (physical) and perceived (psychological) safety may inhibit school performance (Anderson, 1982). Children who are targets of school violence are not only at greater risk for academic failure (Olweus, 1979), but such victims are also more likely than their peers to be truant and to drop out of school (Lane, 1989; Roff, Sells, & Golden, 1972). In addition to academic trauma, children who are victimized at school report having significant social difficulties (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992). Thus, the experience of victimization at school may place students at serious academic and psychosocial risk.

Previous research examining victimization at school has focused primarily on the context of the playground (e.g. Ladd & Price, 1993; Olweus, 1993). The present study advanced this line of research by examining students' perceptions of safety in several settings within the school, and the role of teacher awareness of victimization, supervision of students, and peer and parental support in contributing to students' perceptions of safety and victimization at school

AIMS

1. To examine safety in areas where there is a high level of adult monitoring, as compared to low adult monitoring.
2. To compare teacher reports of who is being picked on or teased at school to peers'

and children's self-reports of passive and aggressive victimization. To compare peers' reports of who is being picked on or teased at school to children's self-reports of passive and aggressive victimization.
3. To examine children's perceived level of social support from parents, teachers, and peers and the impact on their feelings of safety at school.

METHOD

Sample

Third, fourth, and fifth grade students and their teachers (N = 73, 36 boys, 37 girls, 81.1% White, 6.8% African-American, 4.1% Asian American, and 2.7% other).

Measures

Student Perceptions of Social Support

Each students perception of social support was measured using The People in My Life Questionnaire (Harter, 1985). This was a 24-item questionnaire that assessed the students' perceptions of social support from four groups: (1) parent, (2) classmate, (3) teacher, and (4) friend.

Peer Victimization Survey (PVS)

This survey was developed specifically for the project in order to assess the students' feelings regarding safety at school. The "Safety on Schoolgrounds" questionnaire contained 24 items which measured the frequency that students experienced different forms of victimization or aggression at school. Four subscales were created: (1) aggressive victimization, (2) passive victimization, (3) support against victimization, and (4) feelings of safety in areas outside of the classroom.

Peer Victimization

Each student completed a Modified Peer Nomination Inventory (PNI). This was a 26-item inventory that asked participants to nominate classmates who fit specific behavior descriptors (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). In addition, participants were presented with a list of classmates that participated in the study and asked to nominate three boys and three girls who were best described by eight behavioral dimensions (Coie & Dodge, 1983). For the purposes of this study only one behavioral dimension was utilized: "gets teased or picked on". A total score for peer reports of student victimization was created by taking a total of the standard score for the victimization subscale of the PNI and the standard score of the Peer Social Status (Coie & Dodge, 1983) behavioral dimension of gets picked on or teased.

Teacher Report of Victimization

Teachers were asked to complete two questions regarding student victimization.

ANALYSES

1. Grade and gender differences in perceived safety, indicators of victimization, and social support were examined via MANOVA.
2. Students within classroom safety scores were compared to the mean score for safety outside of the classroom via a paired t-test.
3. Students' self-reported playground victimization was correlated with self-reports of passive victimization, aggressive victimization, peer report of student victimization, and teacher report of student victimization.
4. Social support from classmates, teachers, friends, and parents was correlated with safety in the classroom and on the playground.

RESULTS

As a preliminary step, we tested for grade and gender differences among all variables of interest. Three 3(grade level) x 2 (gender) multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVAs) were computed for the following dependent variables: (1) the five social support variables (parent, teacher, classmate, friend, and support against victimization); (2) the three variables indicating feelings of safety at school (safety in the classroom, on the playground, and safety in other areas); and (3) the five indicators of victimization (peer report, teacher report, self-report of passive victimization, self-report of aggressive victimization, and playground victimization). For all three MANOVA's, no significant multivariate F's were found, indicating no gender or grade differences among any of the variables.

1. Students felt less safe in areas outside the classroom ($x = 3.35$) as opposed to areas within the classroom ($s = 3.70$), [$t(71) = -3.87$, $p<.01$]. As Figure 1 indicates, although in general children felt relatively safe at school, the results indicated children felt significantly safer within the classroom than in areas outside of the classroom where there is less adult supervision.
2. Pearson product-moment correlations among teacher reports of student victimization, peer reports of student victimization, and self-reports of passive and aggressive victimization were calculated. As Figure 2 indicates, the results showed that the two self-reported forms of victimization, passive and aggressive victimization, were highly positively correlated ($r = .64$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, while peer-reported victimization was positively correlated with self-reported passive victimization ($r = .24$, $p<.05$) and aggressive victimization ($r = .24$, $p<.05$), teacher reports of student victimization were unrelated to either self report. However, teacher and peer reports of students victimization were positively associated ($r = .36$, $p<.005$). Thus, peer reports were unrelated to both teacher and self reports of student victimization, while self and teacher reports were not significantly related.
3. Pearson product-moment correlations among students' perceptions of social support from parent, teacher, classmate, and friend and perceptions of safety in the classroom and on the playground were calculated. As Figure 3 indicates, social support from classmates correlated significantly with safety within the classroom, [$r = .29$, $p<.01$], and on the playground, [$r = .24$, $p \leq .05$]. Finally, support against victimization in particular was associated with students' reported safety on the playground [$r = .30$, $p \leq .01$]. Thus,

children who felt that they had more support from classmates and teachers felt safer in multiple settings at school.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the presence of adult monitors, especially in non-classroom areas, may be a fundamental component in increasing children's safety at school. The need for increased adult monitoring and awareness of student victimization was also reflected in the findings that teacher reports were uncorrelated with self reports of victimization. Thus, the results of this study suggest that peers may be more knowledgeable about students who perceive themselves to be victimized at school than teachers.

The results of this study also indicate that students who receive more support against victimization in particular were more likely to feel safe at school, suggesting that this form of support may indeed serve as a buffering or protective factor against victimization. Thus, increasing teacher awareness of victimization, social support, and support against victimization in particular from classmates, teachers, and principals may be critical steps towards increasing children's safety at school and reducing violence.

REFERENCES

Anderson, C. S. (1982). The search for school climate: A review of research. Review of Educational Research, 52, 368-420.

Coie, J. D., & Dodge, K. A. (1983). Continuities and changes in children's social status: A five-year longitudinal study. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 29, 261-282.

Harter, S. (1985). Description of The People in My Life Questionnaire: A social support scale for children. Denver: University of Denver.

Hoover, J. H., Oliver, R. J., & Hazler, R. J. (1992). Bullying: Perceptions of adolescent victims in the midwestern U. S. A. School Psychology International, 13, 13-16.

Ladd, G. W.& Price, J. M. (1993). Playstyles of peer-accepted and peer-rejected children on the playground. In C. H. Craig (Eds.), Children on Playgrounds: Research Perspectives and Applications. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Lane, D. A. (1989). Bullying in school: The need for an integrated approach. School Psychology International, 10, 211-215.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1993). National household education survey. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education.

Olweus, D. (1979). Stability of aggressive reaction patterns in males: A review. Psychological Bulletin, 86, 852-875.

Olweus, D. (1993). Bullies on the playground: The role of victimization. In C. H. Craig (Eds.), Children on Playgrounds: Research Perspectives and Applications. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Perry, G., Kusel, S. J.,& Perry L. C. (1988). Victims of Peer Aggression. Developmental Psychology, 24, 807-814.

Roff, M., Sells, S. B., & Golden, M. M. (1972). Social adjustment and personality development in children. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

U. S. House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, & Vocational Education (1994). Hearing on H.R. 6, school safety: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, & Vocational Education of the Committee on Education & Labor, House of Representatives, One Hundred Third Congress, First Session. Washington, DC.: U. S. G. P. O.

Figure 1. Mean difference in students' safety by school location

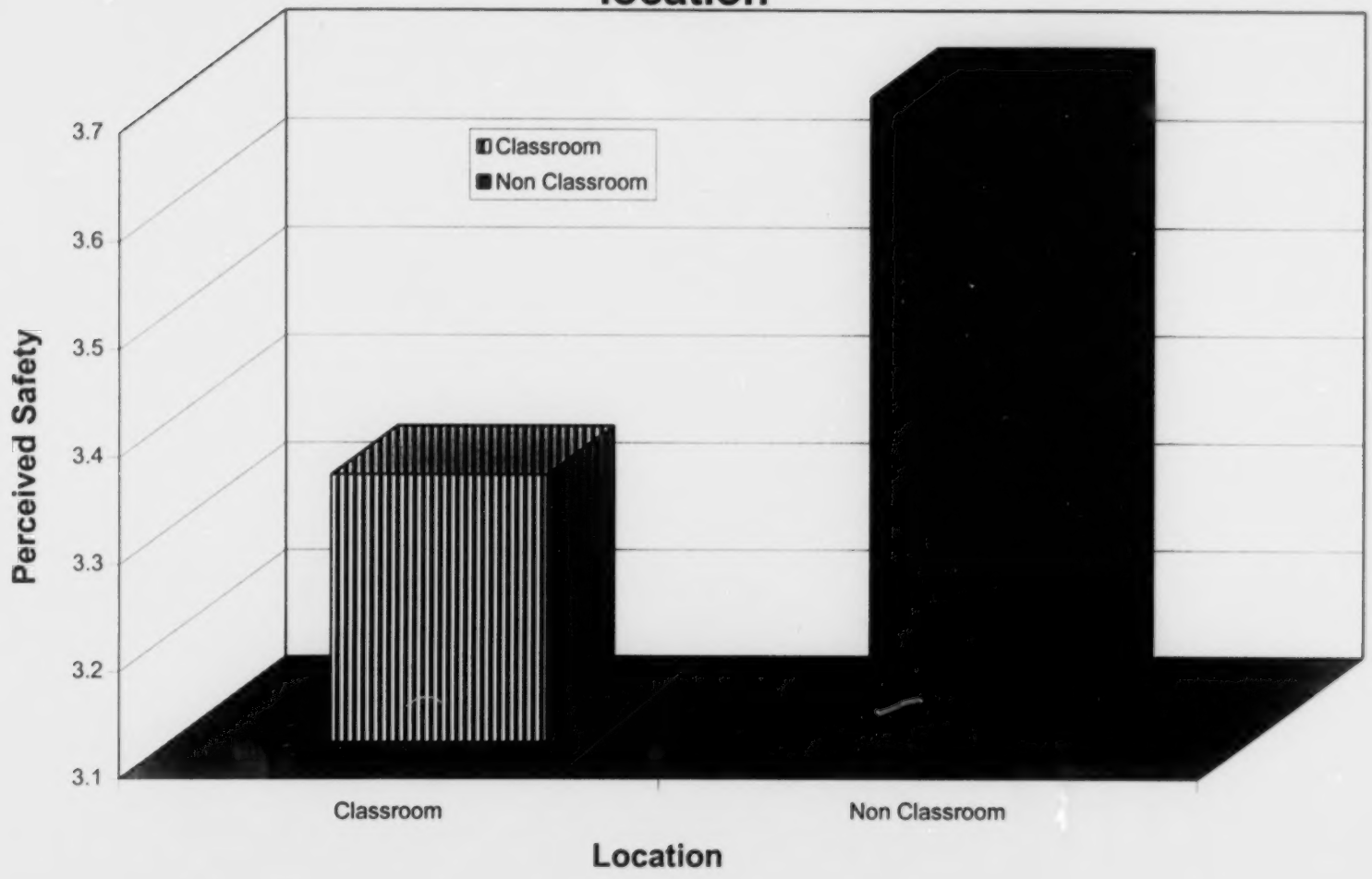

Figure 2. Correlations among self, peer, and teacher reports of victimization

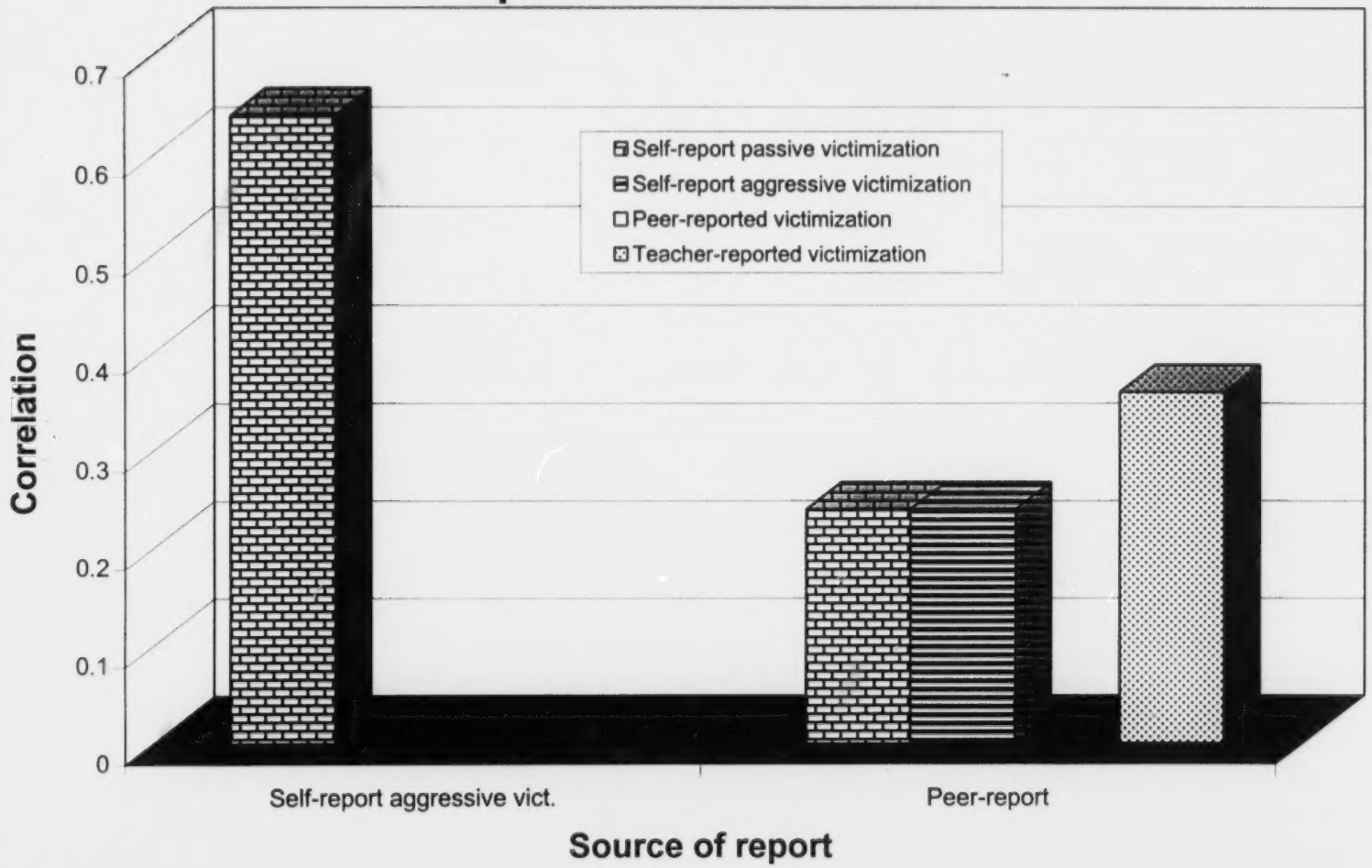

Figure 3. Mean differences in students' perceptions of social support by location